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Drinking Coffee Elsewhere

By ZZ Packer



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Drinking Coffee Elsewhere By ZZ Packer

Chosen by John Updike as a Today Show Book Club Pick.

Already an award-winning writer, ZZ Packer now shares with us her debut, **Drinking Coffee Elsewhere**. Her impressive range and talent are abundantly evident: Packer dazzles with her command of language, surprising and delighting us with unexpected turns and indelible images, as she takes us into the lives of characters on the periphery, unsure of where they belong. We meet a Brownie troop of black girls who are confronted with a troop of white girls; a young man who goes with his father to the Million Man March and must decide where his allegiance lies; an international group of drifters in Japan, who are starving, unable to find work; a girl in a Baltimore ghetto who has dreams of the larger world she has seen only on the screens in the television store nearby, where the Lithuanian shopkeeper holds out hope for attaining his own American Dream.

With penetrating insight that belies her youth—she was only nineteen years old when **Seventeen** magazine printed her first published story—ZZ Packer helps us see the world with a clearer vision. **Drinking Coffee Elsewhere** is a striking performance—fresh, versatile, and captivating. It introduces us to an arresting and unforgettable new voice.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An outstanding debut story collection, Z.Z. Packer's *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* has attracted as much book-world buzz as a triple espresso. Yet, surprisingly, there are no gimmicks in these eight stories. Their combination of tenderness, humor, and apt, unexpected detail set them apart. In the title story (published in the *New Yorker*'s summer 2000 Debut Fiction issue), a Yale freshman is sent to a psychotherapist who tries to get her--black, bright, motherless, possibly lesbian--to stop "pretending," when she is sure that "pretending" is what got her this far. "Speaking in Tongues" describes the adventures of an Alabama church girl of 14 who takes a bus to Atlanta to try to find the mother who gave her up. Looking around the Montgomery Greyhound station, she wonders if it has changed much since the Reverend King's days. She "tried to imagine where the 'Colored' and 'Whites Only' signs would have hung, then realized she didn't have to. All five blacks waited in one area, all three whites in another." Packer's prose is wielded like a kitchen knife, so familiar to her hand that she could use it with her eyes shut. This is a debut not to miss. --*Regina Marler*

From Publishers Weekly

The book form of this debut short story collection is getting the highest of accolades from the New York Times, Harper's, the New Yorker and most every other branch of the literary criticism tree. Likewise, the praise for the audio version of the book should be as lofty. Jordan, who, in addition to being a television and stage actor, works as an acting and dialogue coach, would be wise to use her superb performance here to advertise her business. Packer's stories deal with black men and women, mostly young and urban. Her carefully engineered narratives treat listeners to the richness of highly developed characters and lead them to some intriguing scenarios, like a troop of black Brownies spending their time at summer camp plotting against a troop of what they initially see as haughty white girls; and the deadbeat dad who talks his son into driving him across the country to the Million Man March, not to participate, but to sell parrots to African-Americans. As the reader, Jordan submerges herself completely into her characters, portraying Packer's superbly fleshed out cast with a dazzling versatility and an intuitive sense of delivery. Whether singing Brownie songs or making palpable a character's resounding disappointments, Jordan's delivery is as whip-smart as Packer's text is fiery and precise.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-The characters in these stories are mainly African American, but that is where their similarity ends. From the young Brownie troop member in the opening tale to the teen in the pre-civil rights South closing story, each one has a unique voice. The strong role of the church is evident, but the characters range from the very religious to the very doubtful. Sexuality is problematic-from the older virgin who is more interested in preaching the gospel to the 14-year-old virgin runaway who has also been preaching the gospel but can't help continuing a dalliance with a man she suspects may be a pimp and a drug dealer. The settings are Baltimore, Washington during the Million Man March, and, in a particularly bleak story, Japan. Each selection is strong, but "Brownies" may be the strongest. It's full of dark humor and unseen plot twists, reminiscent in tone of a Flannery O' Connor tale. All of the selections appeared previously in various literary magazines. Older teens will find much to enjoy in this collection. For those studying the short story as a literary format, it would make an excellent companion to more classic tales.

Jamie Watson, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jason Urso:

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Stephen Louis:

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Robert Frith:

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Michael Velez:

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